

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Dissertations and Theses

City College of New York

---

2014

### **The Struggles Within A Society Where Black Women Suffer Racism, Sexism, and Violence**

Karen D. Emmanuel  
*CUNY City College*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc\\_etds\\_theses/224](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/224)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).  
Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

**THE STRUGGLES WITHIN A SOCIETY WHERE BLACK WOMEN  
SUFFER RACISM, SEXISM, AND VIOLENCE**

BY  
KAREN D. EMMANUEL

THESIS/DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of MA in English Literature  
In the Graduate College of the  
City University of New York at New York City 2011

## ABSTRACT

When any group of women has to submit to...atrocities, when they are denied the smallest privacy of body, when they have to stand in public before men and women naked on an auction block and be fingered in the most intimate places, it is absurd to ask them to esteem themselves...The fiber of the human personality is not that independent of the milieu in which it has to struggle for sanity. It was in this way, then, that the Negro woman during slavery began to develop a depreciatory concept of herself not only as a female but as a human being as well. She did not have much of an alternative.

—Calvin Hernton

*Sex and Racism in America*, (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

Marie Evans, “I am a black woman...strong...impervious, indestructible...”1964.

This was the dynamics and consequences during the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1984 where writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison insisted on lifting their voices by writing about the dilemmas that faced black women.

This thesis examines how racism and sexism exist for black women and particularly how black men and white society have played a role to oppress them. They were powerless to do anything about it before slavery, after slavery, after the Women Suffrage during the 1920s, and after the voting rights in 1965. Today it may not be the vote or slave laws that black women have to battle, but it is their

own black men and white society. The behavior of the black men is to induce fear and submission, create hopelessness, carry out abuse and violence, and show retaliation because he seeks to obtain his manhood that has been taken away from him by his white oppressors.

By examining this historically impact of sexism and racism on black women, I clarify the process by which such movements transform social structures and the constraints these women face when they try to restore their fractured lives. But the black woman being pragmatic continue coping, living, and forging ahead because the burden they carry is not just the black men, but their children, and their future.

I use four major texts by Hurston, Walker and Morison to make my argument. Information have been collected from critics and published reports. This thesis makes the argument that racism and sexism are consequential the profound behavior of black men and women.

However, these women rose from the ashes of racism and sexism and committed themselves in implementing their own justice, claiming their own independence, finding their own voices, raising their family, and supporting their black men.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I am pleased to acknowledge my professor, Renata Miller on her time, effort, and honesty. I want to thank Migen Prifti, Advisor of the Humanities and Arts at City College of New York for always sending me reminders of my deadline and being patient. I want to also thank friends and colleagues who offered their moral support. Finally, to my mom, who would have loved to read this piece of writing and enjoy the premise associated with the struggle of black women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Struggle Within a Society Where Black Women Suffer Racism, Sexism, and Violence	
CHAPTER 1 .....	3
Hurston Paved the Way for Black Women Writers To Write About Their Plight	
CHAPTER 2 .....	14
Alice Walker’s Works Models Their Eyes Were Watching God <sup>4</sup>	
CHAPTER 3 .....	45
More Emphasis and Further Elaboration on Hurston, Walker, and Morrison’s Radical Explanation of the Black Woman’s Dilemma	
CONCLUSION .....	76
REFERENCES .....	89

Karen D. Emmanuel

Professor Renata Miller

English

24 July 2011

**The Struggles Within a Society Where Black Women  
Suffer Racism, Sexism, and Violence**

**Introduction**

This thesis will examine how racism and sexism exist for black women and particularly how black men and white society have played a role to oppress them; whether these women came from the muck of Eatonville, Florida, the cities in Georgia, or the roads in Harlem they suffered *humiliation, violence, submission, and abuse*. They were *powerless* to do anything about it before slavery, after slavery, after the Women Suffrage during the 1920s, and after the voting rights in 1965. Today it may not be the vote or slave laws that black women have to battle, but it is their own black men and white society. The behavior of the black men is to induce fear and submission, create hopelessness, carry out abuse and violence, and show retaliation because he seeks to obtain his *manhood* that has been taken away from him by his white oppressors. However, the abuses and violence that these men bestowed upon their family is nothing more than repressed rage aimed at the oppressors. Unfortunately, this internalize anger leaves the black male depressed, hopeless, angry, and vulnerable. The black

man (the oppressed) believes by being the oppressor he assimilates the virtues of the white man (the oppressor) so he can lift himself into a higher social sphere.

This psychological behavior is important because these assumptions have played an important role in the black society destroying families throughout generations.

On the other hand, White Society has provided the climate in which *fear, submission, hopelessness, and violence* exist because of the institution of slavery.

Ultimately, the black woman is the target leaving her vulnerable, suicidal, dejected, and submissive.

In utilizing the novel, *Their Eyes Are Watching God*, written by Zora Neale Hurston, I wanted to show clearly the oppression of black women and the causes and effects of it. Hurston was said to have paved the road for many African Americans women writers to tell their story and to bring about change that would accelerate into generations to come. Many women were listening because in 1937 when the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published, Hurston was pleading to black women to take a stand; it was not until the 1970s did black women emerge expressing their plight as women and doing so so masterfully in literature, politics, and other venues. During that decade, Speakers and Politicians like Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan lifted their voices and forged on courageously fighting for women of color. This was the beginning of a group of black revolutionaries that would bring about change for women and especially for black women.



## Chapter 1

### **Hurston Paved the Road for Black Women Writers To Write About Their Plight**

Zora Neal Hurston, as well as her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, became a paradigm for many black women writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou because of its themes: *independence, consciousness, and self-awareness*. The novel was a significant empowerment. Her *independence* led her to write with a freedom using vernacular language in ways that were pure and true. Her *consciousness* and her *self-awareness* made it possible for her to write in her own voice, a voice that resonated with the tenants of slavery, racism, and sexism. However, slowly rising from this brutality was the ability of the oppressed to become autonomous, cognizant, and self-aware which are major premises explored masterfully in the novel. She was a woman who dared society with nontraditional works. Zora Neal Hurston's voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* inspired Black Women Writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Terri McMillan, and others to implement similar narrative strategies, which addressed racism and sexism. Hurston became the mother of these black writers.

Black women have always fought more than one battle, *racism* and *sexism*. She has been criticized for taking up causes that protect her *individuality* and her *race*. Regardless of the choices she has chosen, she was left with a lack of self worth and uneasiness. Black women have been held down so long by

different oppressors. Therefore, they are using literature as a platform to create change. Zora Neale Hurston was one of the pioneers in African American literature to set the stage for black women to liberate themselves and inspire others to do the same. Their liberation is from their white society, their abusive black men, and the American economy. In order for black women to escape such ills, they have to challenge these oppressive behaviors and take control. In the novels, *The Color Purple*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *The Bluest Eyes*, the authors, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison have imitated Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to make these women not just the victims, but also women that survived and triumphed. They were reliant, self-supportive, bold, majestic, and mysterious.

For black women *sexism* and *racism* is like a sore that is gradually trying to heal, but it is inflicted repeatedly causing a different kind of pain and suffering. The pain and suffering each time becomes manageable. With this sense of depth to the human spirit, a new skin is formed and healing begins where these black women endure. They are carried by the kindred spirits who have gone before them leaving them more powerful and courageous. Whether it is the white man that breaks them down or their black man that mock and abuse them, they still rise. Because for generations, women have been waiting in the wing for the *Time* to be independent not helpless. Yet because of men, *sexist* and *racist* perfunctory behavior women have been suppressed throughout *Time*, which have halted and stalled progress. Eventually, the *Time* did come for Black women; they were moved by the ancestors that had paved a road for them. For Alice Walker,

according to Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston was the ancestor that charted her literary path. Morrison writes, “...these ancestors are not just parents they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom” (Evans 363). The older black women were known to pass down rules and traditions to the younger women and teach them the ways of men and the road society have paved for them. However, it is up to these women to make a difference and change the pattern of *abuse, submission, and violence*. Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* illustrates tradition shared by a grandmother as she has a conversation with her granddaughter about the customary rituals of society.

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out...So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hands it to the womanfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. (Hurston 14).

In the same way that Janie’s Grandmother adamantly informs her about the grim reality to control one’s destiny and the power to control one’s fate, these words resonated with great significance for the female characters in Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes*...The black female character is vulnerable to the black and white male of society. She suffers rape, violence, abuse, and economic challenges because the black man portrayal of hopelessness has manifested into self-hatred, resentment, and powerlessness. She has repressed her anger and taken ownership of the abuse. With this knowledge, she finds herself powerless to make necessary changes to better her conditions. Her state of being is that she is property of her

husband and of his oppressor. She does not have control of her body, and is at the whim of sexual predators and her own husband. Hurston innovative use of the novel *Their Eyes...* renders a compelling scene in which Jamie's grandmother tells her about the wrath of her mistress upon discovering that her husband had a sexual relationship, which resulted in the birth of her mother.

Nanny, Ah come to see that baby uh yourn... You better git dat kivver offa dat youngun and dat quick! She clashed at me. Look lak you don't know who is Mistis on dis plantation, Madam. But Ah aims to show you... Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yallr hair? She begin tuh slap mah jaws ever which a'way... But dem last lick burnt me lak fire... But then she kept on astin me how come mah baby look white... So Ah told her, Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave (17).

Such sexism and racism was prevalent for the black woman; she was both powerless and resilient. "As a female and a slave, she has experienced the power of whites to harm not only the physical body, but the innermost soul: she had understood they had the power "not just [to] work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you" (Conner 31). Not only did Janie's grandmother endure sexual humiliation by the hands of her master and his wife, but Janie's mother was also raped capriciously by her schoolteacher. Such mishap left Janie's mother in despair.

Hence, she abandoned little Janie and left her to be brought up by her grandmother. Such outcome of *violence* left a family in turmoil, despair, and *powerlessness*. Regardless of the violence upon these black women, Hurston gave her female characters redemption. She showed how they internalized the pain, but courageously and cunningly gained their *independence* by abandoning their men or abusive surrounding. Janie leaves her first husband who wants her to work the field like a mule to find love. She finds it in a man called Jody. He has promised her love and a good life. “De day you puts yo’ hand in mine, Ah wouldn’t let de sun go down on us single... You aint’t never knowed what it was to be treated lak a lady and Ah wants to be de one tuh show yuh” (29).

Unfortunately for Janie’s grandmother that was not the outcome, however, Hurston showed her resilience when she endured the rape of the white man, and a near beating from his wife. Using buoyancy, Janie’s grandmother escapes in the night with her baby enduring the rigor of the swamps and hunters just to survive and provide for her family. She finds independence by purchasing property (land) to give her child a better life. Janie’s mother too had been resilient; she also endured a raped by the hands of a schoolteacher who held her for a night, but to find herself she leaves Janie in the care of her mother. These women endured in their struggle regardless of the limitation, but most of all they gained *independence* and *self-awareness*. Hurston echoed these themes in her novel.

These themes are expressed here in an interesting scenario where a black woman can verbalize her dislike for her husband and get support from her grandmother. Something Hurston brought into play to show a bit of unity and

sisterhood as well as *independence*, but primarily to show even-though the woman's place in society is her submission to her husband, she could still find her way to be expressive and self-aware. Hurston describes a scene with Janie complaining to her grandmother about not loving Logan Killicks the man she just married and her grandmother's expressive reaction. The particular part of interest is the grandmother's inquiry. She asks Janie if Killicks had already hit her. Such abuse seems commonplace and expected. The mindset of women was that men would hit you because it is his role as head of household to control woman and children. "You and Logan been fussin? Lawd, Ah know dat grassgut, liver-lipted nigger aint done took and beat mah baby already! Ah'll take a stick and salivate' im!" (22). The grandmother is upset about the abuse and wants to retaliate. However, Janie does not concur about retaliating, she forged an excuse. "No'm, he aint even talk about hittin' me. He says he never mean to lay de weight uh his hand on me in malice" (22). This scene can be interpreted in several ways. One the hitting will come eventually and two, if she did get a beating it would not be out of malice, but out of controlling her and keeping her in place. Is not hitting her a form of suffering? The idea that Janie would make that statement shows a lack of self-awareness and understanding combined with the ways of tradition that were far more ritualistic. Because when the honeymoon was over, the kind words and promised cease, Killicks verbally let Janie know that he aim to have her work; he was taking control.

Long before the year was up, Janie noticed that her husband had stopped talking in rhymes to her. He had ceased to wonder at her long black hair and finger it. Six months back he had told her. ‘If Ah kin haul de wood heah and chop it fuh yuh, look lak you oughta be able tuh tote it inside. Mah fust wife never bothered me’ bout choppin’ no wood nohow. She’d grab the ax and sling chips lak uh man. You done been spoilt rotten (27).

Eventually another man, Jody Starks, entered Janie’s life and married her. He too treated her at first with kindness, as a lady of the house, and with the finer things he could afford. Eventually as Starks became more powerful in his community so did his power to control Janie. The idea that power gives one the ability to control others came from the concept of slavery, rendering one *powerless and dependent*. The *powerlessness* leads to the inability to fight back and the *dependence* makes one vulnerable and weak. Because Jody had established a certain status in his community, he was inclined to prove his manhood by degrading Janie. After a simple task of finding a bill became too much for Starks he says, “Somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none theirselves” (71). According to Hurston, Jody wanted her submission and he would keep on fighting until he felt he had it. Another instance of violence by Jody was a dinner gone badly.

Janie was a good cook, and Joe had looked forward to his dinner as a refuge from other things. So when the bread didn't rise, and fish wasn't quite done at the bone, and the rice was scorched, he slapped Janie until she had a ringing sound in her ears and told her about her brains before he stalked on back to the store (72).

Janie remained powerless and did not lash back. The mere fact that she got dress to go to the store where Jody had returned and do it in a manner where she would not have to be called upon by him showed a great deal of power on Jody's part. He had gotten her to submit to him. His resentment was he was growing old and weak. "Joe wasn't so young as he used to be. There was something dead about him..." (77). But Janie was still vibrant and vivacious. His resentment and fondness to stay in control led him to stripped Janie of her beauty and her dignity by trying to embarrass her in public every time he could.

Because he began to talk about her age all the time, as if he didn't want her to stay young while he grew old...You ain't no young pullet no mo'. You'se uh ole hen now...Dat's something for de young folks, Janie...The more his back ached and his muscle dissolved into fat and the fat melted off his bones, the more fractious he became with Janie. Especially in the store. The more people in there the more ridicule he poured over her body to point attention away from his own (78).



Coincidentally, these black male physical appearance deteriorated and Janie saw their flaws and understood it: Their own self-hatred: A place where these men never attained understanding. It was his inability to take hold of his manhood, to hold himself together, and to hold and protect his family that made him *powerless*. His body failed him as he failed his family. He withered with age as his actions towards his family became repulsive. However, his actions left him pathetic and exposed. On the contrary, their women were able to see their flaws and deteriorating physical attributes and comprehend it: a place the men never arrived at. Hurston was able to show the reader how vulnerable the black male character was. His physical imperfections set him up to be a redeeming individual. Hurston wanted to show the physical features of a man like Killicks as not so appealing, and it was his attributes that is relevant here and not his land. Hence, Killicks's appearance was put into question when Janie felt no love for him. She felt he could be discarded like the piece of land that he owned. "Some folks never was meant to be loved and he's one of' em...Cause Ah hates de way his head is so long one way and so flat on de sides and dat pone uh fat back uh his neck...His belly is too big, now and his toe-nails look lak a mule foots..." (25).

In addition, Joe Starks as he began to age, Janie notices certain physical maladies.

One day she noticed that Joe didn't sit down. He just stood in front of a chair and fell into it. That made her look at him all

over...He didn't rear back in his knees any longer. He squatted over his ankles when he walked. That stillness at the back of his neck. His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidates folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins...Eyes a little absent too (77).

Janie has not voiced her disgust of her husbands' physical appearance to them. Nevertheless, she has voiced her opinion of Killicks to her grandmother and kept her views about Starks quiet because of her consideration for his feelings. "She saw he was hurting inside so she let it pass without talking" (78).

Dissimilarly, Tea Cakes physical appearance was appealing to Janie. She admired his traits, but never verbally expressed it. "She looked him over and got little thrills from every one of his good points. Those full, lazy eyes with the lashed curling sharply away like drawn scimitars. The lean, over-padded shoulders and narrow waist. Even nice" (96).

Hurston does not allow Janie to speak of the physical appearances of the black male characters openly because such quality does not make him a man. Similarly, to Hurston, Walker (*Third Life...* and *The Color Purple*) compared her male character Grange and Mr. \_\_\_ aging to that of Starks. However, Walker has been said to be sympathetic with her male characters as they grow older. "GRANGE WAS A tall, gaunt man with a thick forest of iron-gray hair that whitened shade over the next few years until it was completely pure like

snow...he chewed tobacco, smoked used snuff, drank anything strong and rarely brushed his teeth” (Walker, “*The Third Life*”...163). Again here, (*The Color Purple*) she gives Mr. \_\_ redeeming qualities despite his violent behavior towards his family. Celie saw him differently now that Shug was gone and he had grown older. “Mr. \_\_ look at me real thoughtful. He not such a bad looking man, you know, when you come right down to it. And now it do begin to look like he got a lot of feeling hind his face” (Walker, “*The Color Purple*” 273).

Hurston and Walker have spared the black male characters the humiliation of their physical flaws in public. Was it the intention on the authors’ part in storytelling or was it the reality of keeping the singular thing left for a black man? The black man’s ability to perform of course was linked to his physical appearance. The relationship of physical appearance was important for black males because during slavery they were the most desirable by the oppressor and were used as breeders. On the contrary, the black female was used for everything; she was desirable regardless of her appearance. She was the source that held the disenfranchised families together. The role was countless and in so doing, it also made her assessable for judgment and reproach.

Hurston portrayed how black women endured sexism and racism but within the struggle, they became *autonomous, self-aware, and resilient*. Janie’s grandmother gained independence through economic gain of property and resilience after a rape and beating. Janie’s mother, like her mother was strong

throughout a rape herself. Janie, the main character gains economic independence and freedom after the death of her abusive husband Stark. In contrast, she lost a lover Tea Cake, the one she admired and respected whom she killed in self-defense. Such irony led her to lose the love, the one thing she always hopes to find. Hurston took Janie on a journey to liberate her from society's rules of *submission* and *oppression* into one of *vast understanding, self-awareness, and freedom of will*. The characters for Hurston seem to lose something in order to gain another: a constant cycle of life.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Alice Walker's Works Models Their Eyes Were Watching God.**

Similarly to Hurston's themes *racism and sexism*, Alice Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, (1970) and *The Color Purple*, (1982) examine the grim reality to control one's destiny and to control one's fate within a society where black men and black women are powerless living in the institution of sharecropping which was another form of *slavery*. Walker juxtaposes two worlds, one, which consists of the white planters, and their plantation that thrives economically from its *exploitation* of the descendants of slaves, and the other world of black peasants whose *numbing disparity* becomes *self-hatred* and *deadly violence*. This *self-hatred and violence* are illustrated in scenes crafted by Walker's ability to introduce to the reader the dichotomy of *power* and *powerlessness*. For example, when Grange Copeland is in the presence of the

plantation owner, Walker depicts Grange Copeland as wearing a mask, which conceals his wounded pride for his lack of manhood. His son perceives this during an introduction of the plantation owner when loading the truck with cotton. "Say 'Yessir' to Mr. Shipley," and Brownfield looked up before he said anything and scanned his father's face. The mask was as tight and still as if his father had coated himself with wax" (*The Third Life...* 11).

Not only does his son perceive this lack of *manhood*, but his mother is affected tragically by it too. Margaret, Grange's wife "sits waiting" for her husband who never comes home. During the many month before his final departure when Grange leaves her every Saturday to go off down the road to the juke joint and to Josie's bed the one place where he can still feel like a man..."(Winchell 46). Margaret feels hopeless and helpless. This inability to sustain a loving and stable relationship renders her powerless; she willingly gives her body to anyone who will have her; This act of powerlessness does not happen overnight, but for a period of *Time* where the oppressed automatically takes on their role. Therefore, the oppressed suffers and in so doing, he makes himself powerful by the pain he inflicts on others. He wants *control* and *instills fear* to achieve his goal.

Their life followed a kind of cycle that depended almost totally on Grange's moods. On Monday, suffering from a hangover and the after effects of a violent quarrel with his wife the night before, Grange was morose, sullen, reserved, deeply in pain...Margaret

was tense and hard, exceedingly nervous. Brownfield moved about the house like a mouse (*"The Third Life..."* 13).

Walker paints an image of *powerlessness* of a black woman while enduring the rituals of her husband's hopelessness. She fears him and therefore is incapable of helping him. The numbing feelings have taken control of both man and woman. A game of survival is what is left.

Late Saturday night Grange would come home lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling and shooting off his shotgun. He threatened Margaret and she ran and hid in the woods with Brownfield huddled at her feet. Then Grange would roll out the door and into the yard, crying like a child in big wrenching sobs and rubbing his whole head in the dirt...Grange and Margaret would begin a supper quarrel which launched them into another week just about like the one before (14).

The dichotomy is that the black male cannot transfer his rage towards the plantation owner, but he takes it out on his woman and children. Additionally, this cyclical form of despair has led Brownfield down the same path as his father. Brownfield has realized that he has become his father, Grange; the figure he feared and resented as a child. That realization came the year he saw his oldest daughter Daphne at five years old working the white man's plantation and being

poisoned by the arsenic used to protect the cotton that almost killed her. He too like his father was powerless to control his child's destiny.

It was the summer that he watched, that he had to teach, his frail five-year-old daughter the tricky, dangerous and disgusting business of handmopping the cotton bushes with arsenic to keep off boll weevils. His heart had actually started to hurt him, like an ache in the bones, when he watched her swinging the mop, stumbling over the clumps of hard clay, the hot tin bucket full of arsenic making a bloodied scrape against her small short leg...She was drenched with sweat, her tattered dress wringing wet with perspiration and arsenic; her large eyes reddened by the poison...At the end of the day she trembled and committed and looked beaten down like a tiny, asthmatic old lady; but she did not complain to her father, as afraid of him as she was of the white boss...That was the year he first saw his own life was becoming a repetition of his father's. He could not save his children from slavery; they did not even belong to him (71-72).

Such *helplessness* led to *depression* and year after year reality sets in where Brownfield took on the role as the overseer of his own children and wife where

*accusations* and *abuse* became *commonplace*. “That was the year he accused Mem of being unfaithful to him, of being used by white men, his oppressors; a charge she tearfully and truthfully denied...He determined as such times to treat her like a nigger and a whore, which he knew she was not...” (72).

The anger that Brownfield bestowed upon his family was nothing more than frustration and his inability to protect and provide for them. This powerlessness resorted into *self-hatred* and *violence* towards his family. His father, Grange, perpetuated this type of violence. The ritual of drinking, physical abuse, threats, and fussing became parallel.

Saturday night found Brownfield, as usual, liberally prepared for his weekly fight with Mem. He stumbled home full of whisky, cursing at the top of his voice. Mem lay with her face to the wall pretending to fall asleep...Mem said nothing, lay so silent it was as if she were not breathing or thinking or even being, but her tired eyes rested directly on him with the tense heated waiting that many years of Saturday-night beatings had brought. ‘I’m sick and tired of this mess,’ she said, raising abruptly, waiting for the first blow to head or side or breasts (121).

The abuse Brownfield instilled on his family was heightened by rage.



“It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, although she was not party to any of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. His rage could and did blame everything, *everything* on her” (73).

It was so easy to blame someone, anyone except himself. In the pathos of black males defeated lives, self-hatred becomes scapegoating. For Brownfield, scapegoating is apparent when he is caught in his own malice.

The motive that got him into prison, said Brownfield, was the keen desire to see if he had any control over himself. No matter which way he wanted to go, he said, some unseen force pushed him in the opposite direction. I never wanted to be a sharecropper, never did want to work for nobody else, never did want white folks where they could poke themselves into my life and me not have nothing to do with it (216).

The scapegoating was justified by Grange live-in girlfriend Josie, she too believe that the white folks were to blame for the ills of the blacks.

...when she mumbled what had become of her, the answer to everything: ‘the white folks is the cause of everything.’ Brownfield

did not know why, but suddenly this thought repelled him, just as before he had found support for the failure of his life in it. He felt an indescribable worthlessness, a certain ineffectual smallness, a pygmy's frustration in a world of giants (283).

As with scapegoating, one does not take responsibility for his action, however, the action he does not take comes from a place of hatred and blame. Walker continues to show us where such failure begins and the coping mechanism used to halt the pain ends. The result is the abuse of black women. Black women were constantly the target; ironically, in many ways she was also a hero. Without the black women to lash out at, whom would the black men go after? He probably would cause mental and physical harm to himself and the result would be as it already is, critical.

This is what Brownfield felt like. "He was expected to raise himself up on air, which was all that was left over after his work for others. Others who were always within their rights to pay him practically nothing for his labor" (72-73). Unfortunately, nothing is what Brownfield was left with because of his inability and powerlessness to change his fate.

He was never able to do more than exist on air; he was never able to build on it and was never to have any land of his own; and was never able to set his woman up in style, which more than anything

else he wanted to do. It was as if the white men said his woman needed no style, deserve no style, and therefore would get no style, and that they would always reserve the right to work the life out of him and to fuck her (73).

Walker mentioned the words: *cracker*, *white men*, *oppressor*, and *others* in these quotes because of its significance with the character, Brownfield. He wants so much to lash out at his *oppressor*, *white men*, *others*, and *cracker*, but can not because of powerlessness and the power the *oppressor*, *white men*, *other*, and *cracker* have over him, so he *internalize* the *rage* and displaced it upon those closer to him. Similarly, Walker also shows the reader that the *white men*, *cracker*, *oppressor*, and *others* did not say or do any of these things as mentioned. It was Brownfield's perception of powerlessness that made him tragic. Walker lets the reader know there are possibilities for change; one can change fate and change one's destiny. The words such as: *thought*, *was expected*, *was never*, *it was as if*, *to become no more than* Walker initiated for specific reason. The reader gets a sense that Brownfield was not so powerless to overcome his situation. He made choices that created despair, self-hatred, and violence. Certainly, his treatment and detachment to his family were his choices.

TO HIS THREE DAUGHTERS Brownfield gave the dregs of his attention only when he was half drunk. To him they were not really human children, although his heart at times broke for them. He could not see them

as innocent or even as children. He scolded Ornette, who had come a year after Daphne, with the language he would use on a whore. And the baby, Ruth he never touched (97).

The name-calling and violent verbal and physical abuse were his doings. These choices came from a lack of self-esteem and self-hatred, which were masked, and transference occurred.

Daphne was more forgiving than Ornette. Her temper became murderous only when Brownfield abuse Mem. When Brownfield beat Daphne she tried to endure it by keeping her mind a perfect though burning blank...Because she was so jumpy Brownfield teased her and called her names. He told her she was stupid and crazy. He swore at her, called her Daffy instead of Daphne, and pinched her sides until they bruised...They were afraid of him as Daphne was, but in a more distant, impersonal way. He was like bad weather, a toothache, daily bad news (147).

Daphne faced physical and verbal abuse from her father. The notion of calling a child a nickname can be damning or cute. However, name-calling is used because a person exhibits characteristics traits that reminds one of the thing they are called. Walker shows that even the children too were called names no matter how cute or condescending. Was Brownfield calling his child names because that

is how he sees himself or how the oppressor sees him? The name-calling starts somewhere and therefore escalates. Name-calling is crippling to the human self-esteem and psyche. The fact that Daphne was nicknamed Daffy is no mistake. Walker insists on showing the reader that Daphne took on the qualities and personalities of the little black duck who was a cartoon character created in 1937.

Daffy Duck has a split personality. He was manic, explosive, and unpredictable, engaging in adventures that seemed outlandish even to him. Daffy found himself more and more at the mercy of a universe that seemed to favor everyone but him.... is a victim of injustice who continuously protests...And it's his refusal to surrender his will to the whims of the conspiring universe that makes him heroic (Hunter, *The History of Daffy Duck: What Makes Daffy Duck*. Golden age Cartoon, AOL. Time Warner Inc.)

Unlike Daffy Duck, Daphne never retaliated, talked back, or fought back with her father; she was in constant fear of her father and developed a constant nervous pain. Like Daffy, she was a victim of injustice. And like Daffy Duck, she was at the mercy of the universe. "Her fear encompassed the world and included darkness, buildings, ancient trees and flowers with animal names. She was afraid of the world" ("*The Third Life...*" 158). The irony is that the nervousness became chronic and painful which created a one-time episode of uncontrollable violence towards her sisters. Daphne slapped her sisters because she was appalled that they

could joke about a boy trying to pull Ornette's bloomers down during recess.

This violence was to educate her sisters on proper decorum and self-worth. "Until she slapped them they had thought the whole thing something of a joke" (155).

The lack of self-respect and self-esteem allowed these young girls to tolerate the mistreatment of others. Unfortunately, violence had to be used to prevent more violence, a trait Daphne did not maintain.

Once they had begun to giggle loudly because Ornette, who was in the fifth grade, said that a boy at school was always trying to pull her bloomers down during recess. But Daphne slapped them both hard across the face. She was trembling violently. She never cut up like they did because she had some kind of fits once in a while and was always serious (155).

Despite the use of violence, like Daffy Duck, she was heroic; she did not falter or run away when her father took his anger on her and her sisters. "but it was she who protected her sisters; she who stood trembling and barely able to stand underneath her father's fist, while Ornette and Ruth ran yelling and crying from Brownfield..." (158).

The children had come to know their names as symbols of whom they were and who they would become. Their father had demonstrated his unpleasantness in the usage of words using negative language in exchange of

masking his own pain. The name-calling became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Each daughter internalized and became what she was called. Brownfield explained to Ruth the conditions of her sisters up North by way of a letter that was sent to him by Mem's father.

"...-Daphne's in a crazy house up North. And Ornette – his mouth, usually so vile and slack with whiskey or foul words, was tight and grieving-Ornette's a – lady of pleasure" (276). Ruth reminded her father, Brownfield of the name-calling and its lasting effects: "You were the one who *said* Ornette would *be* a woman of pleasure, a tramp! That's all you used to call her. Just 'tramp.' 'Come here tramp,' you used to say. *I remember that almost as well as I remember my mama*" (277). Yet Ruth was the last child he wanted to get back (not for wanting to care for, but for getting back at his father, by taking the one thing he had grown to love ) after he was released from prison; but he never got the chance to inflict that pain. He was shot dead by his own father in the courtroom after gaining custody of Ruth. The irony is he never got the time to touch her. "And the baby, Ruth he never touched" (97).

Brownfield became a tragic character; he never sought change. His own name signifies the gloominess that is attributed to his characteristics. The naming of Brownfield was no careful choosing. As the doom and colors of violence seem to the world of Brownfield's father so was Brownfield's name. "And what's his name going to be?" he had asked Margaret, feeling no elation at the birth of his son. In her depression, carelessly she asked him, What's the first damn thing you

see?” (228). Grange naming of his son came from what the world looked like to him. It was not pretty or celebratory as when a child is born. Grange saw bleakness and in naming his son Brownfield, he felt there was no hope for this little one either.

And he, standing before the door, saw the autumnal shades of Georgia cotton fields. “Sort of brownish colored fields,” he had answered. And he had wondered, without hope, if that was what covered also the rest of the universe. Brownish color,” she said, pushing the sleeping baby from the warm resting at her breast. “Brownish field. Brownfield.” There was no pity in her for her child. “That’ll do about as well as King Albert” she said. “It won’t make a bit of difference what we name him. Already she was giving him up to what stood ready to take his life... (229).

The hopelessness of both mother and father caused them to neglect the one thing that can define their child (a good name) but they did not give any effort or thought to it. His name had defined him based on the doom that covered their universe. Moreover, he was doomed because of his oppressive behavior towards his family. He had fulfilled the name-calling prophecy. As a child, his father left him, and his mother committed suicide. His life already began a downward spiral setting a stage for hopelessness and self-hatred. The scapegoating and name-



calling were direct correlations of the black man's demise. However, these were some of the coping mechanisms he used to mask his pain.

In a subtle adumbration of themes, Walker focuses the reader's attention on the small details she is about to present during the era of segregation that would capture the historical impact of racism and its unrelenting struggle for survival against a tired land and a tireless overseer. These black men scarcely know where economic exploitation leaves off and racial oppression begins.

His father worked: planting, chopping, poisoning and picking in the cotton field, which ran for a half mile. Brownfield had worked there too now, for four years since he was six, in the company of other child workers...Brownfield waited for the truck along with his father...Brownfield's father had no smiles about him at all...But after watching the loading of the truck for several weeks he realized it was the man who drove the truck who caused his father to don a mask that was more impenetrable than his usual silence. Brownfield looked closely at the man and made a startling discovery; the man was a man, but entirely different from his own father. When he noticed this difference, one of odor and sound and movement and laughter, as well as color, he wonder how he had not seen it before...Thinking this discovery was the key to his

father's icy withdrawal from the man, Brownfield acquired a cold nervousness around him of his own (8-10).

As the understanding of his father's action became clear to Brownfield, Walker pinpoints the nature and development of the damage that racism caused.

Brownfield had told his cousins about the man, and it was then that they told him how his father was owned and of how their father escaped being owned by moving North. It was Angeline who told him that her mother said that Grange was no good; that he had tried to get his wife to "sell herself" to get them out of debt... "He even wanted her to sell herself to the man who drives the truck (11).

Brownfield is now cognizant of not only his father's silence, but also his mother's submission to his father.

Perhaps, he thought, his father's silence was part of the reason his mother was always submissive to him and why his father was jealous of her and angry when she spoke... And maybe his father, who surely would feel bad about trying to sell his wife, became silent and jealous of her, not because of anything she had done, but because of what he had tried to do!... Perhaps she was afraid he

would sell her anyway, whether she wanted to be sold or not. That could be why she jumped to please him (12).

He sees that his father has taken his anger and his frustration out, not on the social system or the people that exercise its power, but on his mother and himself because his father is in a master-servant relationship that remains loyal and submissive to his oppressors.

Walker inculcates upon the reader's mind the paramount importance of her theme, *hopelessness* and its effect on the black community. Such literary device in her narrative becomes more compelling as well as didactic. For generations black males have sought catharsis by using violence towards their own. He has hated his true self because he is deterred by his negative example of his father and rejection of society due to racism.

This despair, violence, and self-hatred affected his wife and children. It perpetuated a vicious cycle of hatred for the oppressor. His children were in constant fear for themselves and their mother. They protected themselves the best way they knew how. However, satisfaction came with only thoughts of wishing death upon the oppressor without actually committing the crime.

Mem ate with her head down,...Daphne sat completely squelched, nervously chewing and beading her dress under the table, as close

to her mother's side as possible. She hallucinated vividly that Brownfield ate so many peas he swoll up and burst. She saw herself helping gleefully to bury him and then watch in horror as the huge twisting and congested pea vines began to come up (108).

Wishing death is one thing, protecting their mother from their father was another. The children felt the pain and rage that came with the abuse. It can cause the same reaction as the adults: self-defense by use of violence. Since Brownfield ritual beatings of their mother became too much the sisters thoughts were filled with fear and revenge against their father.

Mem closed her eyes as he dropped her abruptly against the bedpost and gave her a resounding kick in the side of the head... In the next room, with tears trickling so slowly they made them want to sneeze. Daphne and Ornette held their trembling skinny arms around each other and licked their warm and red tongues over each other's salty homely eyes and wished nothing so hard as that their father would trip over his own stumbling feet, fall on his open knife and manage somehow to jab his heart out...'You reckon he going to come in here?' Ornette asked her sister, thinking of ways to run and also of ways to be a man and protect her. 'he come in here,' Daphne whispered with a grown-up coldness in her voice, 'he come in here, you let him grab you for a minute while I run in

the kitchen and get the butcher knife... 'If by time I get back de done hit you just one time-I'm going go cut his stanking *guts* out! (122-23).

Could such young girls have the will power to change their fate from the oppressor? Their father did nothing to change his. How were they to begin to change theirs? Their father did not confront the violence that was impressed upon him or stop the pain that he inflicted on his family. Instead he became complacent and a contributor of violence. Because of their father's physical and verbal abuse, all acquired a feeling of *guilt* because of helplessness and a feeling of *fear* because of submission.

It became apparent to Ruth and Ornette, finally that they were not engaged in a game. Fear at last hit them and, seeing the gun in his hand and knowing without being told that he was waiting for their mother, they began to cry...Ruth wanted to dash out of the chicken house to her, but she and Ornette sat frozen in their seats...Brownfield lurched out onto the porch waving his shotgun... Brownfield began to curse and came and stood on the steps until Mem got within the circle of the light. Then he aimed the gun with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired (161).

A guilty feeling, which resonates that, asks such questions: “Why had her mother walked on after she saw the gun...? Could she have run away or not?” (161-62). The answer or answers regardless of what it is were found within the feeling of one self-contentment to numb the pain. “... and her bloody repose had struck them instantly as a grotesque attitude of profound, inevitable rest” (162). Her mother submitted to death rather than fight a man whose abuse would never stop.

She wanted to leave him, but there was no place to go. She had no one but Josie and Josie despised her. She wrote to her father, whom she had never seen, and he had never bothered to answer the letter...He berated her for her cleanliness, but, because it was a small thing, and because at times she did seem to have so little, he did not hit her for it (77).

The ability to accept death rather than fight had already reached a point of self-hatred and hopelessness for Mem. She had given up; her inability to protect her children and change her fate became too overpowering. Brownfield was always there to remind her of her fate: that she was not white which meant she could never take herself away from poverty and oppression because of the color of her skin. The same fate he knew he suffered from.

Just remember you ain't white, he said, even while hating with all his heart the women he wanted and did not want his wife to imitate. He liked to sling the perfection of white women at her because color was something she could not change and as his own colored skin annoyed him he meant for hers to humble her (77).

Brownfield did not only remind Mem of her fate, there was the white man's ability to dominate her movement in life and oppress her. This was enough to instill hatred, the kind that begins to ignite into a flame that sets off a reaction of powerlessness.

Being forced to move from one sharecropper's cabin to another was something she hated. She hated the arrogance of the white men who put them out, for one reason or another, without warning or explanation. She hated leaving a home she'd already made and fixed up with her own hands...Each time she stepped into a new place, with its new, and usually bigger rat holes, she wept. Each time she had to clean cow manure out of a room to make it habitable for her children, she looked as if she had been dealt a death blow...she became a woman walking through a dream, but a woman who had forgotten what it is to wake up... Her mildness became stupor; then her stupor became horror, desolation and, at last hatred (77-78).

Still in the midst of fear, self hatred, and violence there was hope for a little girl who wanted to remember her father as he once was: “As they grew older, Daphne, the only one who could remember the scanty “good old days” before Brownfield began to despise them, took the baby and Ornette out under the trees and told them of how good a daddy Brownfield had once been” (97). Unfortunately for the little girl’s hope the “good old days” was short lived and hope had a new name that extended far beyond her understanding. *Hopelessness* instilled violence and self-hatred for her father, but death became her mother’s submission.

Also in her Novel *The Color Purple*, Walker shows the manifestation of black men *incessant violence* and *abuse* upon black women whose inability to control their fate and the white man’s power to keep them all oppressed. *The Color Purple* is about the blacks achieving similar rights as whites. They were able to own property. However, in the Deep South these were technical rights, while some men were able to own land others were lynched for being successful. The position of black women was that of slavery which meant it barely improved. The sharecropper owners’ incentives were to continue the use of labor to work their land. Both benefited: one profited off the labor and the other suffered drudgery trying to survive. Unfortunately, such burden led black men to become *sexual predators, violent, and brutal* towards black women.



In the opening passage of the book, a stepfather makes a threat to his stepdaughter he raped. “You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Walker, *“The Color Purple”* 1). At fourteen years old and scared of her stepfather, she writes to God about her ordeals. Incidentally, because of her stepfather’s self-indulgence and preoccupation with her, her stepmother is both happy and angry with her. When her stepmother inquires about the pregnancy, Celie responds with ignorance and falsification of death, but mitigates by saying God took it. Reluctantly, she is ignorant about her pregnancies or else her response may not have been persuasive. Walker describes this momentous childlike scenario where the reader gets the gist of Celie’s innocence. “When I start to hurt and then my stomach start moving and then that little baby come out my pussy chewing on it fist you could have knock me over with a feather” (2). Celie was not the only individual that suffered by her stepfather’s hand. His wife on her deathbed was being forced to perform sex. “He was pulling on her arm. She say, It too soon, Fonso, I ain’t well. Finally, he leaves her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain’t gonna. Can’t you see I’m already half dead...” (1). A man with no compassion and no love, but self-pity and gratification commits crimes at tragic proportion: The selling of both babies he fathered, the rape of his step-daughter, and the forcing of his near dead wife to have sex. Celie has been violated, forced to grow up and take care of her younger siblings. She was used as if she was a slave. At this age, Celie had no control of her destiny or her fate she was powerless to making changes. Her stepfather’s violence created chaos within the family.

Alphonso, Celie's stepfather is not the only male in Walker's book *The Color Purple*, which has had a profound negative impact on Celie and other women. Mr \_\_\_\_, (Albert) Celie's husband was also *physically violent* and *verbally abusive*. When Mr. \_\_\_\_ oldest son Harpo asked him why he beats Celie his respond was simply callous. "Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for-he don't finish..." (22). Unfortunately, the same violence passed from father to son. Harpo was asked by his father if he ever hit his wife when he complained about her back talking. His father's suggestion was, "Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let' em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (35). The purpose of beating Sofia, his wife came with agreement from Celie his stepmother who herself was abused by Harpo's father. She told Harpo "beat her" (36). This was commonplace for Celie. She began to feel that was the way of life for women. Hopelessness had indeed settled in. She too was powerless against her husband. When Harpo committed the act of violence, he was bruised and hurt by Sofia. The same physical abuse he bestowed upon his wife she returned the favor. Harpo least expected the beaten he received given his experiences of seeing his stepmother being beaten daily by his father. When asked by Celie what happened he responded, "Oh me and that *mule*"...and he keep trying" (36). Such violence fractures a household and eventually a family is torn apart. This is a reminder of Hurston's description of women being called a *mule* and are treated as such in society. The denotation of a woman being called a *mule* says volume about the

respect given to black women. The name was familiar and a reference to a black stubborn woman. Black women were seen as second-class citizen, a classification known to free slaves even after the abolition of slavery.

Like a *mule*, a woman is helpless. Walker uses a simple anecdote to create an adaptation of the white man's vernacular by the black man who uses the term deliberately to express black women. It is one form of power that is available to the black man. Adjusting to his newfound self and shame, Mr- talks to Celie about why he beat and abused her after many years. "I told Shrug it was true that I beat you cause you was you and not her...I know it, he say, and I don't blame you. If a *mule* could tell folks how it's treated, it would. But you know some womens would have just love to hear they man say he beat his wife cause she wasn't them" (270). It is apparent that the *them* is the mule or the men; they rather beat the frail and powerless than to beat themselves down. It arouses them. It is a form of gaining power when there is no power over the oppressor. Like a *mule*, the women are powerless.

Gaining power over the weak is a way for the men to feel powerful if only for a moment. As in her first novel, *In The Third Life of Grange Copeland* Walker describes why Brownfield's beats Mem. "Brownfield beat his once lovely wife now, regularly, because it made him feel, briefly good. Every Saturday night he beat her; trying to pin the blame for his failure on her by imprinting it on her face; and she, inevitable, repaid him by becoming a haggard automatous witch..." (*The Third Life...* 74). Here is a man, uneducated and poor who worked so hard

to pursue his educated wife only to break her down because of his hopelessness and inability to provide and nurture his family. Despite his knowledge of why he did not deserve his wife, his treatment of her was a reflection of how he felt treated by his oppressor.

The tender woman he married he set out to destroy. And before he destroyed her he was determined to change her. And change her he did. The first thing he started on was her speech. ‘Why don’t you talk like the rest of us poor niggers?’ he said to her. Why do you have to be so damn proper?’...In company he embarrassed her. When she opened her mouth to speak he turned with a bow to their friends, who thankfully spoke a language a man could understand, and said ‘Hark, mah lady speaks, let us dumb nigger listen!’ He wanted her to talk, but to talk like what she was, a hopeless nigger woman who got her ass beat every Saturday night. He wanted her to sound like a woman who deserve him (74).

Mem verbal and physical abuse only made her more submissive with little or no complaint. “And when he took her in his drunkenness and in the midst of his own foul accusations she wilted and accepted him in total passivity and blankness, like a church. She was too pure to know how sanctified was his soul by her silence” (72). Celie (*The Color Purple*) like many of the characters needed her husband to survive and provide the necessities and comfort of living. During

that period in time, most women found themselves hopeless and vulnerable losing a battle in which fate had no role. For example, Walker shows the reader that sometimes what we were born into can hold us there forever unless we change it. “For a woman like Mem, who had so barely escaped the “culture of poverty,” a slip back into that culture was the easiest thing in the world...” (*The Third Life...*” 75).

These women endured the physical and verbal abuse, a fate they had no control over. They were small, weak, submissive, and married with children. They took the punishment never retaliated but stood by their men and yet hoping change will come.

Unfortunately, the black men never recovered and change will only come when he faces his oppressor. The black male has internalized generations of abuse by their oppressors, and not lashing out on the individuals that have caused the pain. Sofia in *The Color Purple* describes this internalization perfectly to the white mayor’s daughter she took care of who accused her of not liking her son.

“I love children, say Sofia. But all the colored women that say they love yours is lying. They don’t love Reynolds Stanley any more than I do. But if you so badly raise as to ast’em what you expect them to say? Some colored people so scared of whitefolks they claim to love the cotton gin” (*The Color...*” 265).

Just as Sofia describes the fear of white folks above so such example is shown between two men, one the oppressor (plantation owner) and the other the sharecropper (black man). Without words, but interaction this dialogue gives clear indication of rage masked and powerlessness in its visibility. In *The Third Life..*, Brownfield and Captain Davis his boss and plantation owner, share a moment of insidious conversation. Captain Davis has lone him out to another plantation owner, but Brownfield knowingly cannot reject the offer because of his circumstances. Vividly the reader can experience the feeling of both men interaction with one another:

‘I told Mr. J.L you was going to be looking for a place right soon,’ he said...I told him he could probably do worse than you if he’s in the market for a field and dairyman.’ “Yassur.” He made as if to straightened all the way up but managed to stand stooped a little so that he felt small and black and bug-like, and Captain Davis, with his sparse white hair, seemed a white giant that could step on him...Damned one-arm son of a bitch, Brownfield thought, as he stooped motionless, looking up at the tall white man and waiting to shift his eyes the moment the captain turned his face to him...Let him get his own motherfucking help’ stead of trading *me* off! As the captain turned, Brownfield averted his eyes. A vacant obliging smile wavered on his face. ‘Of course you won’t be living as easy as you do here,’ Captain Davis said as his eyes came to the level of

Brownfield's and Brownfield dropped his own, being careful to maintain a smile that was both alert and respectful...The swap had been made exactly as if he and his family were a string of workhorses. 'I be much obliged to you for putting in a word for me.' He thought about turning down the offer, but when the words of refusal came to his lips he found they would not come out...only a hesitant grunt that sounded like further strangled acceptance ("*The Third Life...*" 104-05).

The bottled up rage grew like a sore for folks like Brownfield and Sofia. It consumed so that at any moment may erupt, however, that rage is held in place by fear of retaliation, hypocrisy, and subjugation of society. Nevertheless, the outpouring of that rage hits home the hardest. Blacks have retaliated on the weak, which has become each other.

Walker expresses retaliation and abandonment for both the *black male* and *female*. In the *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, we see a man leaves his family, only to escape into more despair, other women, and similar issues. Grange has been dependent on the white man's field to make a living, however that living is something he loathes, but he still carries on regardless of the mask he is wearing just to provide for his family. In his mind, Grange had killed a thousand whites, but none so close to murder when he tried to help a pregnant white woman on a fragile icy lake. Her repulsive act towards him made him angry, so angry that

when she fell into the ice, he did not bother to help; instead, he abandoned her. He left the park with a feeling of liberation. “He believed that, against his will, he had stumbled on the necessary act that black men must commit to regain, or to manufacture their manhood, their self-respect. They must kill their oppressor” (“*The Third Life...*” 202). Unfortunately, he was not attacking his oppressors directly, but the women and children of his were his immediate targets. Grange’s action was to help the white woman not hurt her, but instead fate led to her downfall. He never really took vengeance against the whites it was all verbal anger expressed with no action. Similarly, to Grange’s feeling, Sofia in *The Color Purple* talks to Celie about her dreams of murdering ‘them’ while she was in prison. Of course the ‘them’ being the oppressors, the whites who put her there and the gatekeepers of the prison. “I dream of murder, she say, I dream of murder sleep or wake. Us don’t say nothing” (“*The Color...*” 89). The attitude of silence shows diminished action, and only regrets. Even after she came out of prison, Sofia thoughts are about killing. “...Sofia say to me today, I just can’t understand it. What that? I ast. Why we ain’t already kill them off... Too many to kill off, I say. Us outnumbered from the start. I speck we knock over one or two, though, here and there, through the years, I say” (100). No sooner was that conversation held when the Mayor’s son who Sofia was forced to watch kicked a ball in her direction. He shouted and commanded Sofia to play with him, she rejected and he kicked her. In return, she extended the favor, which resulted with him bleeding underfoot from a rusty nail. This seemed illogical because the punishment Sofia faced was not warranted yet Karma would guide the way, instilling pain on her



oppressors. Was fate playing its role here? Does the punishment fit the crime? Was the one by one Celie spoke about begin with the children of the oppressor? Walker was careful not to elaborate on the language, yet she left it for the reader to discern.

No action probably was best because both Grange and Sophia decided to do something positive with that rage. Grange found freedom once he relinquished the anger. The idea of doing the right thing for once seems such a diabolical event. It almost seems tragic. Hence, Walker evaluates the circumstances around Grange to let the reader know the consequences of altering one's fate. Be it so simple, the lives of Walker's characters are anything but that, but be it straightforward. Grange is aware of his actions (abandonment) when he decided to go back to Josie to establish more money to buy a farm to secure his future. He never openly expressed his regrets and ill treatment towards her, but he knew Josie because she was the only one who loved him, but she felt used. Abandonment plays an important role here because of the impact it leaves on the abandoned.

Josie, learning each day that once again she had been used by a man and discarded when his satisfaction was secured. He had done her wrong, and the thought nagged at him and had finally begun to make him appreciate her for the first time...But then there had been Ruth, (grand-daughter) breaking in on his growing love for

Josie, his acceptance of his genuine goodness and adoration. Ruth, who needed him and who was completely fresh and irresistible innocent, as alas Josie was not (“*The Third Life...*” 205).

The downside was that the children understood the complexity of their surroundings. They saw, felt, and experienced abuse, violence, and abandonment often enough to recognize them. The differences were knowing what is right and wrong. “At the beginning Ruth was jealous of Josie, for she thought maybe Grange found her pretty. But Grange also thought his wife was not very nice, and he said so, often and loudly” (164). Ruth is thrown in a situation she has no control over. She is competing with her grandfather’s wife for his love. The complication arises when both females act like children when there is only one child, Ruth. The grandfather’s behavior escalates the problem when he clearly understood the circumstances of both females. He welcomes it. It was his way of getting respect, establishing his position as having power over both of them. Without that friction, he may not know his worth as a man.

Ruth’s jealousy was trying to fit in a new family because her own father had abandoned her. “Ruth sensed that Josie was none too happy to have her with them. “What do I know about plaiting hair on a eight year-old kid?’ Josie had asked Grange one day when Grange wanted her to wash and braid Ruth’s hair” (164).

The abusive atmosphere that Ruth was used to was suddenly taken away from her when her father murdered her mother. The abandonment was sure to

leave the eight-year old lonely and frightened. Unfortunately, not knowing who will protect her and what other abuse she may face, the abuse leaves Ruth with scars that may never heal.

Similarly, to Grange, Sofia too did something positive with her rage. She has acknowledged her disposition, but used her oppressors as a butt of jokes. “Sofia would make a dog laugh talking about those people she work for...But how anything they build can last a day is a wonder to me. They backward, she say. Clumsy, and unlucky” (“*The Color Purple*” 102).

### **Chapter 3**

#### **More Emphasis and Further Elaboration on Hurston, Walker, and Morrison’s Radical Explanation of the Black Woman’s Dilemmas**

What is a dilemma? According to the English (North America) dictionary, the definition of dilemma is a situation with unsatisfactory choices or a situation in which somebody must choose one of two or more unsatisfactory alternatives.

In Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eyes*, Morrison portrays the male characters as profoundly hopeless. These black males find themselves with society’s dilemma, racism. This novel was the product of the Civil Rights and Black Art Movement of the sixties. She writes about racism and the debilitating effects upon the conscience of the oppressed. Echoing a similar theme, Walker

expresses in her novels *The Color Purple* and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* the black man's obsession to become the oppressor using brutality. Moreover, brilliantly using folklore, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, describes the male characters as self-absorbing and his irrational attainment for economic power through threats and abuse. These male characters suffered *loss of manhood*, *self-hatred*, and predisposed *violence*. When oppression is mentioned, there is suffering. It may be mental or physical or both. However, the black woman is the punching bag and sometimes the danger is herself.

The black man's ailment is the black woman's burden. Della, in the *The Bluest Eyes* is dependent on Mr. Henry who has left her abandoned and aging. Darlene feels dejection after a sexual encounter with a young humiliated and angry Cholly. Pecola's innocence ignites abuse by her father, family, and community.

Josie, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* an independent entrepreneur is abused and alone because of her avocation. Mem a hard worker and provider is ravished by age and disease. Celie's *The Color Purple* conformity has left her abused and rejected by her stepfather and her husband and Sophia's outspoken demeanor deformed and imprisoned her. Finally, Janie *Their Eyes Were Watching God* lack of will power left her depressed and wondering. These women were all product of society's ills. They had limited control over their own lives and surrendered to their husbands or lovers leaving fate as a determinant and deterrent. However, the black male manhood unable to materialize into caretaker

and family man ascends into animalistic tendencies. According to Winchell, “The Black man, in turn, reflects his violent relation with his white landowner in his relations with his wife and son (Winchell 44). “Oppressed by white society and victims of the sharecropping system, these males characters took out their frustrations by brutalizing their women, by becoming the brutes the white men who own their labor perceive them to be” (Winchell 43).

When an individual abandons the weak to find respite for himself, does that make him a coward and a brute? A man’s inability to provide and take care of his family can cause him shame; however, the climate in society has accepted his behavior. Society has given him reason to establish veracity rather than guilt. Mr. Henry Washington is leaving Miss Della for better pickings because she has become dependent on him and is getting old. “They say she’s real bad off. Don’t know who he is half the time, and nobody else” (Morrison 13). Henry Washington does not stay with his lover; he abandons her for pleasure and independence because she has become a burden. Like Mr. Washington, Cholly Breedlove has managed to put his family out. However, his community does not take kindly to his actions. “Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having, put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger” (18). Sadly, Cholly has given up on providing and caring for his family because he finds himself in prison. He is useless and powerless to help or incline to help. His manhood had been taken away from him in the presence of

his wife and children. He became resentful and hopeless. Does society have a double standard? Yes, men are expected to behave in such manner. Winchell says, "he expected his sons to experiment with sex...offered man as dominator, as killer, and always as hypocrite...his sexism was merely an imitation of the society in which he lived" (Winchell 7). Unlike the black male, the black woman is bound to her duties in a marriage. Her inability to run renders hers helpless and hopeless in a climate that considers her inferior and her marriage are binding. She is faced with a dilemma, one where alternatives are far reaching. The black male cannot protect her and society's laws do not include her. She has become invisible and her black male has become useless and angry. For Cholly this was the case. This resentment and hopelessness extended to the children who were deeply and profoundly affected. In the same manner his children were affected he too was also afflicted. Cholly's past was his downfall. His helplessness escalated into resentment, which prevented him from helping and protecting his family. He was never protected as a child, and he may not know how. For example, when Cholly was a child, he and Darlene came from his Aunt Jimmy's funeral, they wondered out to play. The playing turned to a sexual encounter. Their thoughts of being whipped by both their guardians were a big concern; however, the whipping instead came from two white hunters who caught them in the act and humiliated them. Morrison portrays the scene as this: "Get on wid it, nigger," said the flashlight one. "Sir?" said Cholly, trying to find a buttonhole. "I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (Morrison 149). Here the white man has turned a simple teenage rendezvous into a rape and *violent* experience. Even

during the ordeal of obeying the white men's command to reenact the sex with Darlene, Cholly's anger was directed towards her and not to the hunters who physically used a flashlight and abused him. His misguided rage had led him to displace his anger and in doing so, he hated the girl he once liked. His *manhood* was taken from him as a youth because of racism, furthermore, leaving him *powerless*. Morrison said, "he was small, black, and helpless (150). Morrison further elaborates:

His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess-that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men-but not now. Not impotence but later, when the hatred could find sweet expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight (151).

Cholly and Micha-Elihue Micah Whitcomb known as Soaphead showed such mentality. These men instilled fear, retaliated, induced violence, and abused those that were weaker and more vulnerable than they were. The women became the object of violence, a dilemma created by their own black male and society's racist climate.

Hurston, Walker, and Morrison concept of *power* and *powerlessness* has led us to see the perpetuating cycle of violence within generations. This disparity for both the black men and women have ruined lives, caused chaos in families, and even turned deadly. Through it all, the black women have endured the oppression, a state of this nation long before Sojourner Truth.

It is important to keep in mind that the history of the slaves plays an important role here. *Self-hatred*, *violence*, and *powerlessness* are a mask worn by those who has internalized generations of abuse by their oppressors. The social ills they commit against one another are due in part by not lashing out at the individuals who have originally caused the pain. They were never taught why these notions of self-hatred, violence, and powerlessness existed because if they did such crimes would be averted.

However, when the black man does lash out it is on his family. Such violence have ruined lives and turned deadly. Grange (*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*) may not have put a gun to his wife's head and killed her, but he did it with his daily physical and emotional abuse. It drove her to commit suicide. Brownfield, comparable to Grange was a replicate of his father. He retaliated not against his oppressor, but his wife; he killed his wife and after killing her, he found himself imprisoned with some regret.

He asked himself, and a great hollow emptiness answered. Instinctively, with his own life as example, he had denied the possibility of a better life for his children. He had enslaved his



family, given them weakness when they needed strength, made them powerless before any enemy that stood beyond them. Now when they thought of “the enemy,” their own father would straddle their vision (*“The Third Life...”* 287).

The vision that Brownfield talks about is his own. When Walker talks about fate, her characters seem unable to cross that path much less change it. If change is left to itself as we have seen with most of Walker’s characters then the worst eventually happens. These men weaknesses in Walkers works retaliated, but the retaliation was upon their own. They have tried to redeem themselves by achieving small things, which was nothing or next to nothing. Some critics may say the black male may not be the one to blame. According to Gloria Wade-Gayles, we should not blame the black male because the black man is a victim who has turned victimizer (Gayles 157). Unlike the black males, which Walker has presented in her books, the black women have come to break the mold of the black woman being brutalized because of her helplessness. Women like Mem, *The Third Life...* and Sophia, *The Color Purple* have used their power to ally themselves with the white oppressors. For Mem, her source of power is education and for Sophia it was her self-respect. The question remains when do the black man become responsible for his actions. Is society setting the black man up to assume the position of a victim until it sees fit to remove the blame? Can this crippling effect become a backlash? The truth is society has done just that. It has allowed the black man to find pity in his behavior. “Mem,...you know how hard it

is to be a black man down here...Mem, baby, the white folks just don't let nobody *feel* like doing right...What can a man *do*?" (*The Third Life...* 127). The irony is the black woman assures the black male that he can be and do better. "The thing I done notice with you a long time ago is that you acts like you is right where you belongs" (127). When is the black man going to take ownership? Without owning up to this responsibility, he can never be free. Mem wanted to be free, so in her victorious moment after a fight with Brownfield, Mem issued Brownfield a set of rules. They were: "Eight, you going to take the blame for every wrong thing you do and stop blaming it on me and Captain Davis and Daphne and Ornette and Ruth and everybody else for forty miles around" (129).

It would be unfair to say that black women are more capable of having had a strong hold on their dilemma with society than their black male. The truth is they have been the victims and sometimes as they fight to escape, we notice the challenges they face. Even when rising from the rage of the black male and society she finds herself beaten down and tired. Therefore, the black women tolerated the abuse and sometimes took on the blame. Josie reminisces about a tragic incident as a young working girl.

She was reminded of a night several years before when a young sailor had come into the Dew Drop Inn and she had taken him upstairs to her room. She had been especially good to him, and when he spoke of paying she had told him to forget it; she knew he

was almost broke and that he was on his way home to his wife and small children. To express his gratitude, the young sailor had wanted to take her again, but she refused because she had other customers waiting. When she refused he beat her black and blue and the people downstairs had to come and pull him off her...She felt she was somehow the biggest curse of her life and that it was her fate to be an everlasting blunderer in misery (283).

The black woman wants out of that cycle of despair. Josie had her own property; she owned a juke joint. Even though the business was tasteless and demoralizing, she owned it and took orders from no one. Similarly, Mem, has worked hard for the whites cleaning their homes to provide a descent place for her family to live in. If her husband would not provide she would find ways to do it. "There was time when she saved every cent she was allowed to keep from her wages as a domestic because she wanted someday to buy a house. That was her big dream" ("*The Third Life...*" 76). Regardless of her hopelessness and disparity, she still finds small comfort knowing that she can provide and one day still moved her family away from the white man's plantation. Regrettably, to her disdain the slave master and oppressor is her husband. "She wanted to leave him, but there was no place to go. She had no one but Josie and Josie despised her. She wrote to her father, whom she had never seen, and he never bother to answer the letter" ("*The Third Life...*" 77). Alone, abused, and exhausted Mem lost all her physical appeal: her hair fell out and she lost weight. Like Janie in *Their Eyes...*,

“The years took all the fight out of Janie’s face...No matter what Jody did, she said nothing. She had learned how to talk some and leave some. She was a rut in the road” (Hurston 76). Janie like most women justified the abuse.

Now and again she thought of a country road at sun-up and considered flight. To where? To what? Maybe he ain’t nothing’, she cautioned herself, ‘but he is something in my mouth. He’s got tuh be else Ah ain’t got nothin’ tuh live for. Ah’ll lie and say he is. If Ah don’t, life won’t be nothin’ but uh store and uh house (Hurston 76).

Again, even though these black women want out of this violence and despair, the beat down and abuse has left them tired of life and the danger has become herself. Oppression and depression can drive one to suicide or murder. Coincidentally, Grange’s wife committed suicide and murder (the killing of her baby) because of her husband’s inability to hold a family together and the abuse she suffered by him over the years. Similarly, because of despair and powerlessness, the mask Grange carried coupled with hatred for himself and for his oppressor made him weak sometimes contemplating suicide. This discourse can cause a man to question his motives and his values. His feelings can be conscious or unconscious, but it is never self-gratifying. “He was immensely sick at times. There were days of depression when he spoke of doing away with himself” (“*The Third Life...*” 163). Brownfield like his father, Grange thought of

suicide because of disparity and desperation. “His indebtedness depressed him. Year after year the amount he owed continued to climb. He thought of suicide and never forgot it, even in Mem’s arms. He prayed for help, for a caring President, for a listening Jesus. He prayed for a decent job...” (“*The Third Life...*” 72). The despair destroys both men and women. Moreover, whether the destruction of lives was intentional or displaced the outcome is purely pernicious.

In *The Color Purple*, it can be inferred that the perils for black men and women were different. Black men owned property, and even that became problematic given the state of the economy in the South. White men would lynch black men if they owned too much land and were thriving. For black women conditions barely improved from slavery. The *sexist* behavior she incurred by her black male counterpart is signified by the deliberate denotation of action and language. The realization is in the narrative foreshadowing and the allusion of her treatment. The black women lived in the black man’s shadow and bear his humiliation. It is no coincidence when Walker invites the reader to look at the circumstances of the characters given the history of slavery. For example, Celie’s stepfather rapes her because he wants sex and his wife is unable to give it to him. He literally sells Celie to Mr \_\_\_\_\_ for the exchange of a cow which coincidentally were names given to women like Celie. The reference to a woman being a cow or any animal was degrading. White men made the same sexist remarks when they talked about women slaves. The black men often verbalized such animalistic

usage when referring to black women as seen when Harpo hits Sophia; he indicated he was still fighting with the *mule*.

The effort made to degrade one is seen as a weakness because it lifts one's mental state over another, at the same time it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The women take on the negative name-calling to express themselves when showing displeasure with an action taken on them. Squeak express anger when Harpo wanted to dance with Sophia. The usage of the word *bitch* referred to Sofia in an effort to emphasize her displeasure. "Listen Squeak, say Harpo Can't a man dance with his own wife? Squeak say, Not if he my man he can't. You hear that, bitch, she say to Sophia" (*The Color Purple* 83).

Hurston's *Their Eyes*... expresses more of such language usage to show how the oppressor perceives the black female. A grandmother talking to her granddaughter on the tradition of the white man, the black man, and where black women fit in. "So the white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world as fur as Ah can see" (Hurston 14). The black men have degraded the black woman solely based on self-hatred and lack of man-hood. The name-calling and rejection by the white man needed to be fulfilled however possible. To gain his autonomy, he had to devalue his own, the black female. According to Gloria Wade-Gayles who quoted Michele Wallace on the Black man's effort to identify his manhood:

Wallace's view was that he was a "narcissistic macho" who expect "a big Afro, a rifle, and a penis in good working order" to be all the weapons he needed "to lick the white man's world." Wallace writes that he has become a martyr...not because of the dependency inflicted upon him in slavery, but his black prospective, like the white prospective, supported the notion that manhood is more valuable than anything else (Gayles 42).

For women the possibility of controlling their own lives has been by societal mores about women's sexuality and their individual responses to these restrictions. So, although poverty is a condition they all share, they have been condemned to the state because society's view of them as women, and their response to that view (Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah 111).

Due to the sexist perfunctory treatment of black women, these women cultivated a weakened sense of self and became submissive. Her dependency for her husband to provide economic support resulted in her weakness of her family and the undoing of her race. *The Color Purple*, Celie was controlled by economic domination. Men of whatever color exercise domination in this text and women are the ones who are victimized. Her children were sold, she herself was sold into

a marriage for an exchange of a cow, ironically, she raised. She was subjected to verbal and physical abuse by her husband Mr \_ and his own children. She was treated like one of the children instead of a wife. “Harpo ast me, How come you stubborn? He don’t ast How come you his wife? Nobody ast that. I say, Just born that way, I reckon. He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be out outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood” (“*The Color Purple*” 22). The fact that she has to be nothing to feel nothing speaks volume of letting herself take the blow without fighting back. A tree fears man she says because a tree like her is helpless even though it is alive. It has no way of fighting back because that is not its function. Squeak, similarly knows how to be submissive. She is Harpo’s love affair after Sofia left him. Her name is an expression of a small annoying voice, heard but has no impact. She is invisible and insignificant. Hopelessly, she is used to persuade the Warden to get Sofia out of prison. The tragedy of that is the Warden who is supposed to be her uncle rapes her. “He took my hat off, say Squeak. Told me to undo my dress... He say if he was my uncle he wouldn’t do it to me. That be a sin. But this just little fornication. Everybody guilty of that” (96). Squeak requested for Sophia’s release, but got the complete opposite of what she went for. She did not vocalize her wishes when the situation was out of control. She remained small, invisible, and insignificant. What is clear is that she made her identity known to the Warden, which gave him access to infiltrate, become personal, and violate her. Her submission towards her family to conform to this suggestion made her weak



and such conformity whether it was out of good intentions raped her of her identity and dignity. Unlike Squeak, Sophia the more outspoken women in the novel has been forced by racism to become submissive. The white culture demand for servitude and Sofia refusal to oblige has turned hypocrisy where Sofia finally accepts. The torture and the beatings in prison mentally and physically broke her down. This is what Sofia tells Celie about her stay in prison. “Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I’m you. I jump up and do what they say” (88).

Celie, Squeak, and Sophia suffered by the hands of their oppressors, be it their husband or white society for first being black and a woman, for daring to change the minds of the oppressed, and for having a voice that opposed the treatments of blacks. The black man’s indiscriminate suffering of racism made him weak and powerless leaving their black women vulnerable and exposed because their dilemma had become their black women’s burden. But the black woman being pragmatic continue coping, living, and forging ahead because the burden they carry is not just the black men, but their children and their future.

So with oppression everyone suffers, some cope with it by using *submission* and others use *violence*. The children too learn the traits of submission and violence by the actions of those closer or around them. Toni Morrison’s “*Bluest Eyes* portrays black men and women hopelessness in a similar fashion. The men again have taken their anger on their women through *rape* and

*abandonment*. The women have denied their existence. Families are detached and destroyed and violence is committed. A similar tragedy during slavery is when the white oppressors fractured lineage because of sales and human trafficking. Both men and women were abandoned becoming a tragic outcome with no recourse. White society has labeled them with animalistic overtones, and the blacks are conceding.

Abandonment by and to these men in Morrison's novel is simply a perpetuating sadistic cycle. It is not mentioned that Mr. Henry Washington was abandoned by his mother, but it is clearly mentioned that Cholly as a child was abandoned by his father and mother. "When Cholly was four days old, his mother wrapped him in two blankets and one newspaper and placed him on a junk heap by the railroad" (Morrison 132). His father was also unaware of his son whereabouts and was not in his life. Cholly's relative, aunt and uncle really did not know the father either, they assumed who he was. "He had four years of school before he got courage enough to ask his aunt who and where his father was. 'That Fuller boy, I believe it was,' his aunt said. He was hanging around then, but he taken off pretty quick before you was born" (Morrison 133). Cholly like Grange also abandoned his family and children. The lack of love and self-hatred has perpetuated a trend in this family's history. "That old trifling Cholly been out of jail two whole days and ain't been here yet to see if his own child was 'live or dead. She could be dead all he know. And that mama neither. What kind of something is that?" (Morrison 67).

Morrison invites the reader to acknowledge the pain and suffering of these men and try to redeem them because of what they have endured. These men although violent at times, they too were looking for love and did not grow up knowing what it were. They have confused the interpretation for love into rape and violence. Therefore not only did these men lose their manhood they lost a sense of self. Such grim reality to control one's destiny and the power to control one's fate resonates with these characters.

What is clear is love is an interpretation of one's experience with it. However, an inquisitive little girl, Pecola wants to know.

She thought of Dewey Prince and how he loved Miss Marie. What did love feel like? She wondered. How do grown-ups act when they love each other?...In her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed. He making sound as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence (57).

Be it simple, hence many take it by force. Such a force is called *rape*.

Rape has a history and has become a senseless crime against the weak. The act of rape may not always be sexual, but it is the abduction and force that further makes it vile. Women and children are always the prey of such crime. History also makes it clear that white America had plumage families, raped men, women and children when they abducted and abuse them. The reasoning was to produce labor and make profits; Let us compare this to a similar crime. Morrison eloquently describes the reasoning for a battered and abuse father's rape of his own daughter. The reader gets a feeling of not just disgust, but also a feeling of pity for Cholly. Whether his actions were based on his upbringing, the choices he decided to make at that moment defined his fate.

But the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be. Had he been interested in the accumulation of things, he could have thought of them as his material heirs; had he needed to prove himself to some nameless "others," he could have wanted them to excel in his own image and for his own sake. Had he not been alone in the world since he was thirteen, knowing only a dying old woman who felt responsible for him, but whose age, sex, and interests were so remote from his own, he might have

felt a stable connection between himself and the children. As it was, he reacted to them, and his reactions were based on what he felt at the moment (161-62).

Morrison evoked this statement for a reason to have the reader thinking whether one is blame by the choices he makes or by the history of his past. Pay attention to how Morrison craftily gave a brief synopsis of the background of Cholly before she relay the act he committed on Pecola, his daughter. Was Morrison preparing the reader to be sympathetic or was Morrison simply just sympathetic by nature in her writing? What was Morrison's objective here? The word choices that Morrison uses evoke *weakness* and *pain* as she describes Cholly and Pecola. "...he staggered home reeling drunk and saw his daughter in the kitchen" (161). The word *staggered* evoked a sense of weakness and the inability to hold one self up. "She was washing dishes. Her small back hunched over the sink. Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt" (161). *Small, hunched* denotes the weakness and frailty of the little girl Pecola. The term *dim* in the passage shows a lack of clarity of his sight and a disapproving and unfavorable act. "The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence" (161). Morrison is preparing the reader here to acknowledge the ability for Cholly to discern between weakness, hopelessness, and his own lust. "Her back hunched that way; her head to one side as though crouching from a permanent and

unrelieved blow. Why did she have to look so whipped?” (161). If the words alone do nothing for the senses then Cholly’s admonition says it all. He looked upon a weak and frail child and questioned her helplessness. It perhaps reminded him of his frailty when the two white hunters humiliated and abused him as a child. He could not do anything because he was black, small and helpless. He further questions his ability to aid her, but instead, gives more reason to justify his lust for her. “The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness” (162). The act Morrison is about to tell is not one of tenderness towards a feeble, weak and helpless child, but that of a crime committed because Cholly wanted revenge, revenge of the past consequences that harmed him. He wanted to be free of his pain, give the pain back to those he never was able to take on. Instead, he sorts to instill pain on others, which was his own little girl.

But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her virginal was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly into out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. Following the disintegration—the falling away — of sexual desire, he was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrist...but

whether her grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion, he could not tell (163).

The ideal words of: *thrust, provoked, rapid loss of air, falling away, stubborn struggle* all evoke death, which corresponds with the killing or dying of a human being. What is interesting is Morrison association of the *loss of air from a circus balloon*, which she further emphasizes the childlike innocence.

In regards to *freedom*, Cholly longed for it. Whether it was to forget the pain and suffering of his childhood or the hardship as an adult, he long to be free. Yet the pain he cause on his own daughter as she struggle to be released, he still could not decipher whether or not he was the one she was trying to escape from. He too was trying to escape from himself after realizing what he had done. “Removing himself from her was so painful to him, he cut it short and snatched his genitals out of the dry harbor of her virgina” (163). “Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her” (163). Morrison’s characters struggle to understand the human spirit: love, violence, and death.

Cholly was not the only character that seemingly struggle with understanding his emotions, Soaphead Church too was even more of an impetus character. He justified his behavior simply on his moral duty to do good because he seems to pride himself with an Angelic notion. “The residue of the human

spirit smeared on inanimate objects was he could withstand of humanity” (165). Unlike Cholly, he had a sexual craving, but it was controlled, balanced and complicated. Like Cholly, his sexual cravings were of the weak: little girls. “His attentions therefore gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive-children” (166). “They were usually manageable and frequently seductive... his patronage of little girls smacked of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness” (166-67). The freedom that Soaphead possessed were that of the dangerously free, and Cholly was not free. If you own yourself, one can make choices. Cholly was not a slave to a master; he was a slave to society. He did not feel free; therefore, he could not make right choices. Soaphead on the other hand was free; so he thought. He came from a lineage of men that prided themselves on being like the white man. He knew himself and knew that he hated humankind: An angelic form of resisting the flesh and not having human qualities. “He was engaged in a line of work that was dependent solely on his ability to win the trust of others...having dallied with the priesthood in the Anglican Church” (165). The freedom that Soaphead sought was to control others. “...he settled finally on a profession that brought him both freedom and satisfaction. He became a “Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams” (165). Morrison also wants to show the reader that regardless of the mask one puts on there is always a weakness and in Soaphead’s case, he used people to do his bidding in this case an innocent little girl. “She was about twelve or so, and seem to him *pitiful unattractive*” (173). The mere fact that Morrison stated *pitiful* and *unattractive* should be noted because the next verse claims Soaphead’s existence.



“If you are overcome with trouble and conditions that are not natural, I can remove them” (173). This is a prelude for ignorance and death. In telling the little girl that she is, the one to carry out his hideous plot against an innocent dog because her ugliness defines it is one of Morrison’s rich and signifying plots. The plot is not spoken it is conveyed in the actions of the characters. The dog and the unattractive little girl, Pecola, seem to fit quite well: The ugliness destroying the ugly. I pose the question: Does Soaphead loved the innocence and cleanliness of little girls? Why would he want her to dirty her hands? Isn’t he setting her up for punishment and rebuke by the Angelic one? That is because ugliness does not exist in his world. Moreover, of course he sees himself not as the sacrificial lamb, but the savior of the lamb. The dog was a form of ugliness and so is this innocent little girl. Despite the little girl’s ignorance to be made beautiful, Soaphead still utilized her to carry out his vindictive plot, one he could not carry out himself. What does that make Soaphead? Does one good deed deserved another. As far as he was concern, the dog needed to be put out of its misery. “The dog was mangy; his exhausted eyes ran with a sea-green matter around which gnats and flies clustered. Soaphead was revolted by Bob and wished he would hurry up and die” (171). The irony is the little girl gets her beautiful blue eyes, but the dog is dead. Ignorance has a new saying: Payment using the blood of the innocence. “But I gave her those blue eyes she wanted. Not for pleasure, and not for money” (182-183). The tragedy is how Soaphead Church justifies his doings and at the same time run a mock with personality and name-calling. “Tell me, Lord how could you leave a lass so long so lone that she could find her way to me? How could

you? I weep for you, Lord. And it is because I weep for You that I had to do your work for You” (180).

The emphasis of a name as Morrison shows is significant. The “*You*” being capitalized remains a mystery, except to say, it replaces, “*Lord*” and “*You*” may takes on the generalization that everyone is responsible: family, society, and individual in this lack of nurturing and caring for such a little and innocent child.

Assuming the name Soaphead means “*head of a clean church,*” the breakdown would be soap is used for cleaning thing, which is what Soaphead saw himself as; head would indicate the ruler of; and church of course would be the building and his mannerism towards celibacy. These were indication of whom he represented: “...he equated lovemaking with communion and the Holy Grail” (170) “...the neatness of Dante, was in the orderly sectioning and segregating of all levels of evil and decay...God had done a poor job, and Soaphead suspected that he himself could have done better. It was in fact a pity that the maker had not sought his counsel” (173). Indeed the name became significant because of what it stood for and he took it and wore it as a badge of honor for its meaning became important to him. It was he, all of him.

I cannot remember how or why I got the name. What makes one name more a person than another? Is the name the real thing, then? And the person only what his name says? Is that why to the

simpliest and friendliest of questions: ‘What is your name?’ put to you by Moses, You would not say, and said instead ‘I am who I am.’ Like Popeye? I Yam What I Yam?” (180).

The insertion of Popeye by Morrison suggests belligerence and as Popeye took on a casual attitude toward grammar; he was a sailor with a speech-impediment and cartoon character during 1929, who took strange, humorous, and often supernatural adventures all over the world, which place him in conflict with enemies. He was known to woo a maiden name, Olive Oyle and ate spinach to gain supernatural strength when taking on an adventure, rescuing Olive, or to save the day. Soaphead characteristics were all too similar to Popeye’s which indicates Morrison is deliberate, but smooth with her insertion into the speech. Unlike Popeye who was the savior of the maiden, Soaphead was looking for a maiden (Velma) to rescue him. “He had never got over her desertion. She was to have been the answer to his unstated, unacknowledged question-where was the life to counter the encroaching nonlife?” (170) The image that Morrison portrays shows that she is funny by poking fun at the silliness of a man that believes he is better than God or Morrison is conveying that God is just a name, believe what you want. Similar to Popeye, Soaphead takes these supernatural adventures in his mind. This belief of being supernatural is what Soaphead cherishes; it made him feel grand, and to feed an ego he had and wanted stroked. “The women of the town early discovered his celibacy, and not being able to comprehend his rejection of them, decided that he was supernatural rather than unnatural” (171).

His ego led him to take on a name that seems unnatural to say the least. The same people who were in awe of him by the way he spoke English gave him the name. The dichotomy was his ability to change from an impeded speech-speaking sailor to a Standard American English speaker when it suits the occasion. “Once he understood their decision, he quickly followed through, accepting the name (Soaphead Church) and the role they had given him” (171). The name alone had given him power to “...counseled those who sought his advice” (172). In doing so, he felt he had the power and rights to question God and be belligerent with words. Soaphead writes a letter to God; he cannot help but make fun of it and at the same time reprimand God.

It's quite alright. Don't be vexed. I mean no offense. I understand. I have been a bad man too, and an unhappy man too. ... You have to understand that, Lord. You said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and harm them not.' Did you forget? Did you forget about the children? Yes. You forgot. You let them go wanting, sit on road shoulders, crying next to their dead mothers. I've seen them charred, lamed, halt. You forgot, Lord. You forgot how and when to be God (182).

Walker again shows that same belligerence towards God in *The Color Purple*, when Celie decided not to write to God as she stated to her sister Nettie in her letter.

Dear Nettie,

I don't write to God no more, I write to you.

What happen to God? Ast Shug.

Who that? I say.

...what God do for me? I ast.

She say, Celie! Like she shock. He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death.

Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, low-down dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown (*"The Color Purple"* 192).

The idea that both Soaphead and Celie were writing to God for different reason signifies the normality of the characters and the human beliefs and disbeliefs in faith. Soaphead writes to God to boast and brag that he can do a better job. Unlike Celie God was her salvation and the only one she can talk to. However, communication for Celie between her and God is being severed because she realized it might have been in vain when she wrote these letters. Soaphead continues to write to God, still justifying, but confessing his sins. Both seem to echo that God does not answer prayers.

Hurston, Walker, and Morrison have shown that hopelessness is a direct correlation of violence and abuse. Men and women struggle differently given the norms of society. However, the cycle of such hopelessness is tragedy. It is important to mention that although the authors, Hurston, Walker, and Morrison portrayed the violent *tendencies* of black men they also did justice to show where it was developed. In a stream of consciousness, one can only imagine that too often, blame is placed, but not the source. It is only fair to pinpoint the source and draw concrete evidence for a conclusion about the flaw.

Accordingly, E. F. Frazier in his study of the Negro family he stressed the remains of the African heritage as being insignificant. “Probably never before in history has a people so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America” (Herskovits 3).

According to Herskovits, another student of the American Negro E. B. Reuter reviewing E. F. Frazier’s work, give unconditional assent to the point of view expressed in the preceding passage when he writes:

The ...Negro people...were brought to America in small consignments from many parts of the African continent and over a long period of time. In the course of capture, importation, and enslavement they lost every vestige of the African culture. The native languages disappeared immediately and so completely that scarcely a word of African origin found its way into English, owing to the dispersion, to the accidental or intentional separation

of tribal stocks, and to the suppression of religious exercises. The supernatural beliefs and practices completely disappeared; the native forms of family life and the codes and customs of sex control were destroyed by the circumstances of slave life. And procreation and the relations of the sexes were reduced to a simple and primitive level, so with every level of the social heritage (4).

Charles S. Johnson's analysis of the present-day Negro plantation life, the comment on background similarly follows the accepted position:

The Negro of the plantation came into the picture with a completely broken cultural heritage. He came directly from Africa or indirectly from African through the West Indies. There had been for him no preparation for, and no organized exposure to, the dominant and approved patterns of American culture. What he knew of life was what he could learn from other slaves or from the examples set by the white planters themselves (4).

It is no mistake as an anthropologist that Hurston knew the behavior of the men and women and their rituals were that of their oppressors. Instead of blaming the black male for his proclivities that seem outrageous, primitive, and violent, Hurston wrote a novel depicting the lifestyle of the black male whose initiatives

and lifestyle were of the white male oppressors. According to Donna H. Winchell, for Walker, “Hurston gave them the knowledge of their condition” (Winchell 23). The black male took hold of his life where he could and fall into the labor pattern demanded by American need and customs and to fit himself as best as he could into the mores of his society.

The men in Hurston’s novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are mere copies of the white male. They have imitated the white man ways, which is the closest role model they have in dealing with their women and family. Morrison says it better here in “*The Bluest Eyes*” when Soaphead committed violence against an old feeble dog using a little girl to carry out his vindictive scheme. He writes a letter to God.

We in the colony took as our own the most dramatic, and the most obvious, of our white masters’ characteristics, which were, of course, their worst. In retaining the identity of our race, we held fast to those characteristics most gratifying to sustain and least troublesome to maintain. Consequently we were not royal but snobbish, not aristocratic but class conscious; we believe authority was cruelty to our inferiors, and education was being in school. We mistook violence for passion, indolence for leisure, and thought recklessness was freedom... Our manhood was defined by acquisitions. Our womanhood acquiescence... (Morrison 177).



The downfall is that they mistreat their women because this is the only way they can gain respectability for themselves and in their community. Their property at times was their women and children. In hindsight, the black male really did not own anything, wife or children. The idea of owning property is the idea of the oppressor. Nevertheless, in retrospect, they treated the black woman as *the mule*, which Hurston talks about. The black male has found a way *to break* the black female (*mule*) in the same way the oppressor did to him.

The oppressors did not just break the black male in, he transformed him. The transformation was to emulate white America: the attire, the house, the physical appearance, and class-consciousness. In Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes...* the ability to own land or property determined wealth and status. In Walker's novel, *The Color Purple* and *The Third Life...* it was also the ability to own property, be independent, have beauty, and create a class structure. The ideal achievement was pursuing these standards and attaining them. In *The Bluest Eyes* Morrison examines the underclass blacks that emulate white American standard of beauty and class. Such standards have cause extreme psychological distress and hopelessness. This distress manifests itself in the form of malignant self-hatred and shame. The burdens of these men have evolved into the black woman's dilemma.

## Conclusion

The conclusion to be drawn from the discussion in the preceding chapters may be summarized on broad lines as follows:

- 1) Hurston wrote, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from a prospective of self-reliant, independence, and a self-confident black woman. She believed in writing about the race problem and the black defensive reaction to white oppression. As a novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist, Hurston brought out the cultural, political, and economic venues that were displayed in her novel. She succeeded in raising the *consciousness* of black people and admits that there are problems that need to be addressed. Black women have carried the load that has been passed on to them by their husbands. Whether it is the harsh reality of poverty, economic dependency, hopelessness, sexism and racism, these women have internalized them all. However, they refuse to be victims and be powerless. Such like Janie's grandmother who believes that economic status is important and it should be emulated. This type of thinking was a transcendence of racism. Subsequently, refusing to have her granddaughter live in poverty, Janie's grandmother marries her off to Logan Killicks, a hard working older farmer who has sixty acres of land. But Janie refuses to barter her fulfillment in exchange for land. "Youse mad' cause Ah don't fall down and wash-up dese sixty acres uh ground yuh got. You

ain't done me no favor by marryin' me. And if dat's what you call yo'self doin', Ah don't tank yuh for it (Hurstun 31).

Hurstun shows that her female characters can *be independent* and *self-aware*. After her second marriage to Jody, Janie is still not satisfied with being the Mayor's wife. She is humiliated, threatened, belittled, and abused by Jody. She wants to flee. On his deathbed, Janie confronts her husband about her inner feelings. "You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't half know me atall. And you could have but you was so busy worshipping de works of yo' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their minds till you didn't se uh whole heap uh things yuh could have" (86). Janie repudiates respectability for her own freedom.

Gayles reaffirms the traditions of the black males when she says,

Black men in the novels as a rule, do not see black women beyond the services they render to others, most especially to men. They see a house clean, meals prepared and served, and children tended to. Rather than the women who have performed the chores. They understand money problems and racial problems rather than the problems of their women that go beyond money and race. They see bodies to be had rather than minds to be respected and aspirations to be encouraged. They believe that husbands and wives

should share the responsibilities associated with families, but they do not themselves share by performing traditional women's roles in the home. They understand that pain is real and deep, but they do not disengage themselves from their own pain long enough to recognize the pain their women suffer (Gayles 200).

It is no mistake that Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Watching God*, based on her experiences. She was often criticized for her work. A critic like Darwin Turner is quoted by saying “quick tempered woman, arrogant towards her peers, obsequious towards her supposed superiors, desperate for recognitions and reassurance to assuage her feelings of inferiority...” (Walker and Washington 11). Washington continues to quote Turner, but with reservations of calling him a sexist.

Although Darwin Turner blames Zora Hurston's obscurity on the fact that she got sandwiched in between the exotic primitivism of the Harlem Renaissance and the protest mood of the forties, another possibility suggests itself: she was a black woman whose entire career output was subject to judgment of critics, both white and black, who were all men (11).

Gayles concurs with Washington in saying,

They do not know that they are sexist. And significantly, they are not sexist because they are black or even because they are victimized. They are sexist because, as men, they are socialized to be sexist. Sexism has no respect for race or class, just as racism had no respect for sex (Gayles 200).

With notions such as this, it was vital that Hurston paved a way for black women to exercise their power and be *independent*, *self-aware*, and *conscious* of the ills they face with their own black male and especially white society. Women like Janie, her mother, and her grandmother have suffered and have become triumphant because they refuse to be powerless. They escaped their oppressors in the middle of the night, on his deathbed, and in the schoolhouse searching for freedom. Such sovereignty was determined by desperation and a refusal to be enslaved both mentally and physically an illusion that their fore fathers had submitted to.

- 2) The black women are the recipients of the unending struggle of the black man's identity and powerlessness. However, she is also the healer of her own pain and others of the past and of the present. Because the black woman understands that although they have been exploited, degraded, enslaved, abused, and rendered helpless by the

hands of her black male, she knows that the black male have been programmed into sexism and destroyed by racism which are the experiences in white America.

Walker like her mentor, Hurston have urged black women to be independent, vocal, and yet patient with the black male. She conveys this attitude in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, when Mem Copeland had the courage to stand up against Brownfield's verbal and physical abuse and understands his reasons of self-destruction. In addition, in the *The Color Purple*, Sophia's refusal to be beaten by her husband Harpo, and her incessant verbal ploy to liberate herself from the brutality of her white oppressors.

However, some critics will disagree. They claim Walker is accused of the portrayal of black men as brutal and violent. According to Harold Bloom for Richard Wesley, this is what he sees Walker's writing as:

What angers black men as they read (*Color Purple*), or watch the film version, is that all the black men are portrayed as fools; the women are portray weed as noble and long-suffering. If they have any weaknesses, they are weaknesses seemingly brought about by their long association with these foolish men. Walker had a point to make, and she had not need to include those black men who, with the help of the women in their lives, raised large families, sent

their children off to school and into reproductive lives (Bloom 68-69).

Whether her critics agree or disagree with her, Walker says,

Furthermore, I believe it is prompt accountability for one's choices, a willing acceptance of responsibility for one's thoughts, behavior and actions, that makes it powerful. The white man's oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you, whether you are a man, woman, child, animal or tree, because the self that I prize refuses to be owned by him. Or by anyone (Winchell 43).

This message above is quite clear, everyone is responsible for his or her actions; however, Walker falls short in explaining why she had to take this stand in the first place. After all, her characters as she has been writing about have been exploited because of racism. For example, Brownfield's fate of getting a job to provide for his family has led him down the same path his father Grange was trying to escape, a sharecropper with mounted debt. The irony is that Mem's nurturing has kept him grounded, but for how long. His years of working the white man's land have still managed to keep him penniless, so he abandons his duty as a provider because he finds himself frustrated, hopeless, and powerless. "For Brownfield, moving about at the whim of a white boss was just another example of the fact that his life, as it was destined, had gone haywire," and he

could do nothing about it. He jumped when the crackers said jump, and left his welfare up to them” (Winchell 48).

The resentment Brownfield and Grange felt they took out on their wives and children because they dare not risk taking it out on the white oppressor. So black women like Mem, Celie, and Sophia are targets of abuse because their power, not their lack of it, allies them with the white oppressors. These women have taken their independence and their power back. Mem’s source was education, Celie’s respite was love she received by her sister and children, and Sophia’s freedom was that of speech. This is what Hurston and Walker wanted to achieve, and they did so brilliantly telling it in their novels. Hurston said even though women are the mules of the world, they outperformed in duties, outsmarted their male counterparts, and gain self-independence while still uplifting their black men. Walker said the black men were contemptible, by shedding his human characteristics in the form of a mask, toward his white oppressors, but lashing out on the black woman and children in any vile form possible; the black woman has been resilient and heroic, but conscious of their black men’s plight. So on many occasions they have tiptoed around their men’s flaws in hopes that they too will achieve that understanding of self-awareness and independence.

- 3) There were no laws that govern the way women especially black women were treated. The law was the white man’s racist and sexist actions and the black man’s emulation of it. Because of the black



man's burden, women have been the scapegoat, sexual victims of violent abuse, and murder without repercussion.

Morrison like her female writers, Walker and Hurston were determined writers encouraged to show and reveal the heightened yet secret reality of the black culture. These writers have presented similar motifs such as racism and sexism and its causes, yet they have not shown how society helped the battered and bruised black female. What these writers did show is the black female's ability to *compensate, negotiate, and integrate* the violence and abuse in their daily lives. There were no laws or system in place to protect the black woman. Her silence cast all the shame of rape away. So she cowers, shrinks, or resides behind the walls of madness. Here are examples of how she *integrated* with the violence of rape. Cholly (*The Bluest Eyes*) rapes his own daughter Pecola and leaves her in silence. "The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been" (Morrison 162). The regaining of consciousness followed by the rape leaves Pecola speechless and in madness.

Soaphead, who asserts himself as master, the law, and god, violates a little girl when he uses her to kill a dog.

Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it...She placed the meat on the floor of the porch, near his nose...He ate it in three gulps... Choking, stumbling, he moved like a broken toy around the yard...She made a wild, pointless gesture with one hand and then covered her mouth with both hands (Morrison 175-76).

Similarly, Celie stepfather rapes her and then sells her. The beginning of the book started silencing Celie. "You better not never tell nobody but God, It'd kill your mammy" (Walker, "*The Color Purple*" 1). These men have violated ethical and moral codes of conduct.

The law came in the form of the enduring shame suffered by the family, the punishment given by the black mothers, and the black community's scorn. For Pecola, this was her *compensation*. "They say her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself" (Morrison 189). The community response "Can't help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground" (190). The community did not rally to help the family they expressed their opinions openly.

They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would

say, "Poor little girl," or "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils (190).

Celie suffered the same fate as Pecola. "My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me. I'm big. I can't move fast" ("*The Color Purple*" 2). The community did not give support either. "Don't nobody come to see us" (2). Her stepfather has made her at fault for his transgressions. "He act like can't stand me no more. Say I'm evil an always up to no good" (3).

The rape has robbed Celie and Pecola of their identity. Such loss causes a vicious cycle of depression leading to inner turmoil such as suicide and low self-esteem. Margaret *negotiated* her life in this manner. When her husband, Grange left them (a man who himself have committed the same sin) she committed suicide and murdered her child she bore out of her infidelity. "Well. He's gone," his mother said without anger at the end of the third week. But the following week she and her poisoned baby went out into the dark of the clearing and in the morning Brownfield found them there" ("*The Third Life...*" 26). Margaret has punished herself for her infidelity; she has taken ownership of her husband's self-hatred and powerlessness.

In addition, Celie's low self-esteem has created concern for her sister-in-law as she cautioned Celie about her treatment by her husband, Mr. \_ and his son Harpo. "You got to fight them, Celie, she say. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself.... What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" ("*The Color Purple*" 21). Celie has given up the fight of exploitation, verbal abuse, and abandonment; she succumbed to the hopelessness of racism and sexism and felt powerless to overcome it. The law was invisible and these women suffered. Their only recourse at the time was to circumvent the violence by using *compensation, negotiation and integration*.

Women did not only suffer in silence that drove them to madness, suicide, or become scapegoats, but they were also resilient to the abuse of their black men and society's lawless system. According to Walker however, "Not all black men victimize their women. Not all are cold, selfish, rejecting, or, for that matter, broken" (Gayles 199). Similarly, Walker, like her fellow writers Hurston and Morrison know that black women love and support for black men have been evident, but they also know that these black women are not always going to be the doormats of racism and sexism. Their resilience has forged them to cope and confront the problems that are all too familiar to black women and all women. Mem gains her autonomy when she strike back at Brownfield,

And just think how much like an old no-count dog you done treated me for nine years. She tightened the grip on the gun... Women ugly as you ought to call a man Mister, you been telling me since you *beat* the ugly into me! Look at you now, crying like a little baby that's going to be whipped for peeing in his pants (*"The Third Life..."* 127).

Celie gains her self-esteem when she confronts Mr. \_ of his abuse towards her. "Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say... Look like when I opened my mouth the air rush in and shape words... The jail you plan for me is the one in which you will rot, I say... I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook... But I'm here" (*"The Color Purple"* 207).

These women rose from the ashes of racism and sexism and committed themselves in implementing their own justice, claiming their own independence, finding their own voices, raising their family, and supporting their husbands' egos. They did all this in order to put their fragmented lives back in order. Because in a society that have forged a sense powerlessness and helplessness in their paths, these black women have postured themselves to overcome not just as textbook survivors, but also as real every day heroes.

Today, black women are successful in works of literature, film, media, business, politics, corporations, education, and many more. They have slowly

eradicated the stereotype of the powerless black female syndrome. They have struggle within a society where black women suffer racism, sexism, and violence and have come out triumphant. However, there is still so much more to accomplish such as challenging the status quo. But, quite frankly, the road will not be easy when the black man has yet to take back his manhood and the white man's unwillingness to break the vicious cycle of rejection and hatred are averted.

## Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *Alice Walker: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide Bloom's Major Novelist*. Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000.

Bloom, Harold. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999.

Conner, Marc C. *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

Evans, Marie. *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. New York: Anchored Books, 1984.

Gates, H. Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Amistad Literary Series: Gloria Naylor Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad Press Inc., 1993.

Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.

Hunter, Matthew. *The History of Daffy Duck: What Makes Daffy Duck*. Golden age Cartoon, AOL. Time Warner Inc. Web. 10 Aug. 2009.

<<http://toolooney.goldenagecartoons.com/daffy.htm>>.

Hurston, Zora N. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1990.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Penguin Group, 1994.

Wade-Gayle, Gloria. *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Gender in Black Women's Fiction*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997.

Walker, Alice and Mary Helen Washington. *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...* New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1970.

Walker, Alice. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1970.

Winchell, Donna H. *Alice Walker*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.